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**MAJOR NON-NATO ALLY STATUS FOR JORDAN: NATIONAL SECURITY OR  
PEACE PROCESS POLITICS?**

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COURSE 5603 – THE NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY PROCESS

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On September 25, 1996, the President directed the Secretary of State to notify Congress of his intent to designate the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan a “major non-NATO ally” of the United States, pursuant to Section 517 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the President directed the Secretary of Defense to designate Jordan a major non-NATO ally pursuant to the authority contained in 10 U S C 2350a.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, Jordan was designated a major non-NATO ally of the United States on November 12, 1996.<sup>3</sup> This paper will examine the bureaucratic processes leading up to that designation and the roles played by the various policy actors. These include the bureau of Near East Affairs in the Department of State, the Office of International Security Affairs in the Department of Defense (which initially withheld its support for the designation), Congress, the Government of Israel and the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). At the end of the day, this designation had little or nothing to do with US security interests and everything to do with peace process politics.

The National Defense Authorization Act of 1987 extended eligibility for participation in the NATO Cooperative Research and Development Program instituted in 1986 to certain “major non-NATO allies” (MNNA), i.e. countries outside the NATO sphere but of significant strategic interest to the US. Countries having MNNA status in 1987 included

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<sup>1</sup> National Security Council Memorandum of September 25, 1996 from Executive Secretary Andrew D. Sens to Department of State Executive Secretary William J. Burns

<sup>2</sup> National Security Council Memorandum of September 25, 1996 from Executive Secretary Andrew D. Sens to Department of Defense Executive Secretary Col James N. Mattis

<sup>3</sup> Presidential Determination No. 97-4, “Designation of Jordan as a Major Non-NATO Ally,” November 12, 1996

Australia, Egypt, Israel, Japan and the Republic of Korea. The Department of Defense in 1988 enumerated the following criteria for such status.<sup>4</sup>

- Each nation represents a unique and strategic U S interest which argues persuasively for increased rationalization, standardization, and interoperability which parallel many of our efforts with NATO allies
- Each nation currently utilizes a wide range of U S systems and technology which it is in our long-term interest to improve and modernize
- Each nation has the ability currently to contribute to U S conventional defense modernization through an established, sophisticated, and innovative research and development base
- Each nation currently possesses an impressive production infrastructure with demonstrated potential to assist our overall modernization efforts

Designation as a MNNA may come under one of two authorities, a Congressional or Presidential designation under Section 517 of the Foreign Assistance Act, or by designation of the Secretary of Defense under Title 10 USC 2350A (the Nunn Amendment). Each authority confers specific benefits. Under Section 517, a MNNA may be granted

- Priority for the transfer of Excess Defense Articles
- Exemption from prohibition on the sale of depleted uranium munitions
- Use of Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for commercial leases instead of government-to-government sales
- Basing of DOD War Reserve Stockpiles for Allies
- Cooperative training on a reciprocal basis

Under Title 10 USC, a MNNA may benefit from

- Bidding for certain DOD contracts

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from Deputy Secretary of Defense William H Taft IV to the Honorable Les Aspin, Chairman, House Armed Services Committee. September 1988

- Cooperative research and development (R&D) contracts to improve conventional defense capabilities
- Joint R&D projects on counter-terrorism technology
- Free loan of DOD materials to conduct cooperative R&D, testing or evaluation
- Eligibility for USG loans for defense articles and services under the Defense Export Loan Guarantee Program, if designated a MNNA prior to March 31, 1995.

Indeed, with respect to most of the previously designated MNNA countries, the U S enjoys an active, cooperative R&D relationship, characterized by Department of Defense sources as "beneficial to both sides." The exception is Egypt, which although designated a MNNA in January 1987 has not developed a cooperative R&D program with the U S., and is closer to Jordan than to the other MNNAAs in terms of technical development<sup>5</sup>

Precisely when and where the notion of designating Jordan a MNNA was born is not clear. Institutional memory recalls that Senator Inouye, at the behest of former Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage, first proposed the designation in a 1995 bill that later died in conference. The idea was also floated in the State Department's Bureau of Near East Affairs (NEA) in the fall of 1995 and AIPAC proposed the designation to Department of Defense officials in early 1996, hoping that Jordan could take advantage of Defense Export Loan Guarantees.<sup>6</sup> What is clear, however, is that the Administration during this period was seeking every possible means to bring "the fruits of peace" to Jordan and to reward King

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with confidential source, DOD/OUSD/A&T/INCP, December 1, 1997

<sup>6</sup> State Department internal memorandum from Jordan Desk to NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary Toni Verstandig, dated August 5, 1996 and interview with confidential DOD/OASD/ISA/NESA source on November 18, 1997

Hussein for having signed a treaty of peace with Israel in October 1994, while encouraging a hardened Jordanian stance toward Iraq. This was becoming increasingly difficult given budgetary constraints and a penny-wise Congress increasingly skeptical of seemingly endless Administration initiatives on behalf of Jordan, which despite its peace with Israel had been, after all, on the wrong side of the Gulf War.<sup>7</sup>

The Congressional tune was different in October 1994, immediately following the historic events at Wadi Arava. The Hill was broadly supportive of an Administration initiative to forgive Jordan's official debt to the U.S., totaling nearly \$700 million.<sup>8</sup> This was to be the centerpiece of U.S. support for Jordan, which also included an increase in Economic Support Funds (ESF) from \$7 million to \$10 million annually – insignificant by global standards – and \$100 million in Excess Defense Articles (EDA). There was an increase in Jordan's Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance from \$30 million to \$45 million annually. The Administration also began to provide modest amounts of money for de-mining assistance.

Congressional sour notes began to sound when the Administration, led by the State Department in response to a request from King Hussein, drove through a proposal for the provision of a squadron of F-16s for Jordan under a "no-cost, low-cost" lease, with a \$220 million price-tag. A number of elements at the Department of Defense were not supportive

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<sup>7</sup> During the course of Hill consultations on the F-16 program for Jordan, senior Senate Foreign Relations Committee staffer Danielle Pletka questioned DOD and State Department arguments that Jordan deserved additional security assistance given its new stance toward Iraq, stating that "virtue should be its own reward." The author's notes of November 1995 consultations.

of this initiative on its practical merits and Congressional staff were aware of this divide in the Administration's position. Nonetheless, Jordan's partner in peace, Israel, was also in favor and Congress ultimately yielded.<sup>9</sup> By the time funding for the F-16 package was sorted out – which included tagging funds on to a Defense Department Bosnia supplemental and committing Jordan's FMF in the foreseeable out-years to supporting the F-16 package, there were bruised feelings at the Defense Department and on the Hill, and a feeling that State had "pulled a fast one." From then on, Congressional staffers asked warily what else the Administration had up its sleeve for Jordan.<sup>10</sup>

In July 1996, the NEA bureau began pursuing MNNA status for Jordan in earnest. It was believed important to continue visible initiatives in support of King Hussein, who was facing an increasingly restive populace, disappointed by the absence of significant economic benefits in the wake of the treaty with Israel and psychologically displaced by the Jordanian government's hardened stance toward Iraq following the Hussein Kamel defection of August 1995. There also remained considerable and vociferous domestic opposition to the continued "normalization" of relations with Israel, particularly following the Qana incident of April 18, 1996, when an Israeli shell landed inside a UNIFIL compound in southern Lebanon, killing at least 70 Palestinian refugees.<sup>11</sup> From State's perspective, it was important to demonstrate

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<sup>8</sup> The actual cost to the American taxpayer to "buy off" this debt was closer to \$400 million.

<sup>9</sup> Caroline Faraj and Philip Finnegan, "Israel Lobbies White House for Military Aid to Jordan, U.S.-Built F-16 Fighters Would Serve as Symbol of Peace," Defense News 10, no. 50 (December 1995): 6-8.

<sup>10</sup> The recounting of the F-16 episode is based on the author's notes and conversations with colleagues and counterparts at DOD as well as Hill staffers during the period November 1994-November 1996, during which time the author served as Public Affairs Advisor to the Assistant Secretary for NEA and the Jordan Desk Officer, respectively.

<sup>11</sup> "Middle East Peace Process, Chronology of Major Events 1991-1997," Internal memorandum, Office of Israel, Arab-Israeli Affairs, U.S. Department of State, dated July 30, 1997.

Jordan's parity with Egypt, Israel's other "peace partner" and itself a MNNA. An added benefit was that this designation did not, in and of itself, carry any budgetary costs. A memorandum dated August 5, 1996 to the Deputy Assistant Secretary notes that there would be "few substantial benefits to Jordan" but underlines the "symbolism of Jordan being given a privileged status enjoyed by few other non-NATO countries which would underscore our increasingly close military and security ties."<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, the Defense Department's Office of International Security Assistance was somewhat less enthusiastic. Defense was "extremely reluctant" to support what was essentially a State initiative, particularly following the F-16 fiasco. According to one staff member, the directive was that "we will give State as much support on this as we got on our request that State seek additional FMF for Jordan to cover the F-16 costs," something State had not been prepared to do given its other budgetary requirements. This was particularly galling to Defense, whose focus over the last 20 years -- with a brief hiatus during and immediately following the Persian Gulf War -- had been on professionalizing and modernizing the Jordanian Armed Forces through a relatively modest FMF program. The reallocation of Jordan's FMF to the F-16 program for the foreseeable future dealt a significant blow to this program and put the onus on Defense to identify other "deliverables." On more fundamental grounds, Defense was concerned that designating Jordan a MNNA would dilute the intent of the legislation, which was to identify countries with compatible industrial and technological bases for cooperative R&D. Defense was also concerned that

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<sup>12</sup> Memorandum from Director of Office of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Palestinian Affairs to Deputy Assistant

this status would provide nothing of substance for Jordan. And from a political perspective, Defense did not want to spend this bullet on the Hill when the Administration had other outstanding requests for Jordan.<sup>13</sup>

There was a good deal of logic to the argument that the designation would bring little new to Jordan in practical terms. As a matter of policy, Jordan already had priority access to Excess Defense Articles (EDA). With respect to sales of depleted uranium munitions, Jordan had never expressed an interest in purchasing such sophisticated munitions and lacked the financial means to do so. Neither could Jordan offer the advanced level of training foreseen by the clause allowing for cooperative training agreements on a reciprocal basis. Jordan did not have – and would not have for the foreseeable future – the scientific capability to participate in the kinds of R&D projects envisioned by the legislation. Finally, and most importantly, Jordan would not be eligible for the Defense Exports Loan Guarantee Program since it had not been designated prior to March 31, 1995.<sup>14</sup>

The National Security Council was supportive of the MNNA initiative, but accorded it no exceptional priority.<sup>15</sup> NSC staff had arranged with the Jordan Desk at State that the desk, in coordination with Defense, would draft a memorandum from the Secretary of State to the President, recommending that he designate Jordan a MNNA. The President in turn would instruct the Secretary of State to notify the Hill of his intent to designate. Given the

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<sup>13</sup> Secretary Toni Verstandig, "Designating Jordan a Major Non-NATO Ally," dated August 5, 1996

<sup>14</sup> Interview November 18, 1997 with confidential source at DOD/OASD/ISA/NESA

<sup>15</sup> Internal State Department memorandum prepared by NEA/ARN and L/NEA. Not dated

<sup>15</sup> Interview December 4, 1997 with confidential source, former NSC/NESA Staffer

general lack of enthusiasm at Defense for this initiative, the memorandum process quickly became bogged down in details. Events in the region, however, intruded to streamline and expedite the process.

First, the U.S. Ambassador to Amman relayed reports that during a September 23 visit to Jordan, Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu's advisor, Dore Gold, had taken up directly with King Hussein the matter of MNNA status for Jordan. This provoked concern within the Administration that this designation be seen as a U.S. initiative, because of the importance attached to Jordan, and not as an Israeli proposal.<sup>16</sup> Almost immediately following, on September 25, crisis erupted in the region when Israel decided to open an archaeological tunnel along the Western Wall of the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem. This provoked widespread Palestinian rioting and the first instance of Palestinian security forces firing on Israeli forces. In reaction, President Clinton invited King Hussein, Prime Minister Netanyahu and PLO Chairman Arafat to attend a summit in Washington, October 1-2.<sup>17</sup> Now there were two additional factors motivating Administration action on the MNNA initiative: first, the desire to "own" the initiative, and second, the desire to have a "deliverable" in hand for the King's arrival in Washington. As a result, the President issued his directives of September 25, 1996 to the Secretaries of State and Defense indicating his intent to designate Jordan a MNNA absent any initiating documentation from the State Department, which in the event never made it through the clearance process.

The Congressional notification process that followed was unremarkable and no objections were registered. In their letters to the relevant committee members, the Secretaries of State and Defense noted that Jordan was deemed eligible for this designation because it "represents a unique and strategic U.S. interest, that it has joined Egypt and Israel as a full partner in the effort to seek peace in the Middle East, and that it maintains ..a wide range of U.S. military systems and technology."<sup>18</sup> A State Department announcement dated November 14, 1996 similarly emphasizes Jordan's role as a partner for peace.

Since Jordan signed a treaty of peace with Israel in 1994, we have been working successfully to meet the President's commitment to support King Hussein as he advances the cause of peace. Defense draw-down legislation and the transfer of an F-16 squadron were important steps in fulfilling that promise. Designation as a major non-NATO ally is another step, and underscores the strategic relationship between the U.S. and Jordan.<sup>19</sup>

### Conclusion

Clearly Jordan's designation as a major non-NATO ally had more to do with peace process politics than with national security concerns. While one might argue the finer points of Jordan's "unique and strategic" interest for the U.S., it does not have the ability to "contribute to U.S. conventional defense modernization through an established, sophisticated and innovative" R&D base or have a production infrastructure with "demonstrated potential to assist our overall modernization efforts," as envisioned in the 1988 Taft letter cited at the beginning of this paper. This episode can also be seen, by those who wish, as yet another

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<sup>16</sup> Internal State Department memorandum from NEA/ARN to NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary Tom Verstandig, "King Hussein's Meeting with SecDef Perry," dated October 3, 1996.

<sup>17</sup> MEPP Chronology of Major Events, 1991-1997, supra.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs Barbara Larkin to the Honorable Jesse A. Helms, Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, dated October 16, 1996.

<sup>19</sup> Statement by Glyn Davies, Acting Spokesman, U.S. Department of State, November 14, 1996.

example of the State side of the house employing Defense assets for its own political ends, as also occurred with the F-16 package. In this regard, it is probably fair to say that the "peace process" is a particularly sacred cow for the Administration and inasmuch as State has the lead on this issue, State shall continue to propose (or react to events!) while others dispose. However, the larger trend, i.e. attempting to employ Defense Department assets for State-determined ends, will continue for the simple reason that Defense has the goodies and the "super military power" cachet that goes with them. On the other hand, one might make the case with regard to MNNA status for Jordan that the designation is inherently political and devoid of greater national security significance<sup>20</sup> -- and that if it were not so, Defense would have had a greater say. One certainly hopes so.

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<sup>20</sup> According to a confidential source, former NSC staffer and member of the Israel Desk in 1986 interviewed on December 3, 1997, "major non-NATO ally" status was invented by the State Department in 1986 to accord Israel certain benefits then available only to NATO members. Egypt, South Korea and Australia were added as fig leaves."

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